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**BELARUS**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Spinning Compost Into Gold

### **Volunteers assist firms to establish growing vermiculture industry**



Photo: CNFA/Lucy Sokolovskaya

Employees in Cherven, Belarus, pack red worms for fishing bait. Two firms in Belarus have discovered that, with proper investment and knowledge on vermiculture from USAID, worms can be a big business.

***Two companies in Belarus that market worms and the enriched top soil they produce have turned a profit after implementing vermiculture advice from USAID volunteers.***

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In Belarus, the production of enriched top soil is gaining popularity and offering stable income potential to a number of entrepreneurially-minded people. About 100 small-scale vermiculture operations existed in the early 1990's, but the vast majority of them failed, mainly because they looked at the worm business as a get-rich-quick opportunity and were unwilling to make long-term investments. However, Belarus has since seen a resurgence of commercial worm composting.

With limited opportunities to learn about new, innovative practices in vermiculture, two Belarusian private enterprises, BelRosBioTech and PromKhimElectro, looked to volunteers from a USAID program to help them produce enriched topsoil and compost products more profitably. The two experts from the United States helped the enterprises to increase the quality and quantity of their worm casting-derived compost, as well as find new markets.

During their two week assignment, Peter Bogdanov, executive director of VermiCo, and his wife, Layne Bogdanov, a marketing specialist, held individual consultations with the two Belarusian vermiculture producers. The volunteers acquainted the entrepreneurs with the complicated process of raising red worms and producing organic compost. The Bogdanovs helped them develop a detailed evaluation of their marketing strategies and made specific recommendations for their implementation.

Acting on the volunteers' recommendations, both enterprises have developed collaborative relationships with neighboring manure producers to obtain manure, which produces healthier worms, at a minimal cost. The volunteers also helped the enterprises improve their feedstock preparation and application practices, create attractive packaging for their product, and establish a demonstration garden to educate potential consumers.

Today, both businesses are busy and thriving. In less than a year, they have increased their compost production from zero to 350 tons, and red worm production to four tons. All produce was sold in Belarus through retail shops, bringing almost \$25,000 in total revenue from sales and even generating a small profit.